

# Report

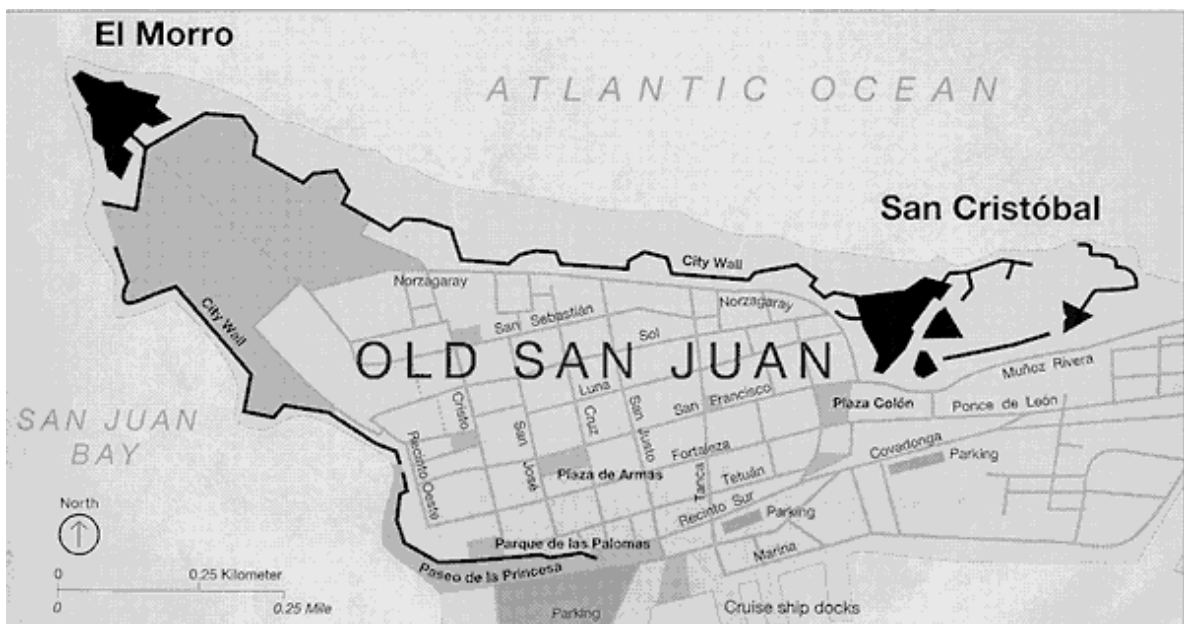
## San Juan National Historic Site

### ■ 1.0 Site Description

The San Juan National Historic Site (NHS) contains the “New World’s” oldest Spanish military forts. The Forts is located in the city of Old San Juan, Puerto Rico, where it once acted as the Spanish fortress designed to protect Spain’s American holdings. Sections of the massive sandstone walls, as well as the San Cristóbal and San Felipe del Morro forts, date back to the 1630s. The park is located in the western part of Old San Juan, a 615-acre island that is connected by three bridges at the eastern end to the city of San Juan. The Puerto Rico Capitol Building and legislative offices are located near the east end of the Park. The major access routes to the site are via Muñoz Rivera Avenue and Norzagaray Boulevard. Traffic congestion is a common occurrence on these routes. On weekends, holidays and during special events, Old San Juan roads experience severe gridlock.

As shown in Figure 1, the Park consists of approximately 75 acres with the following main sites:

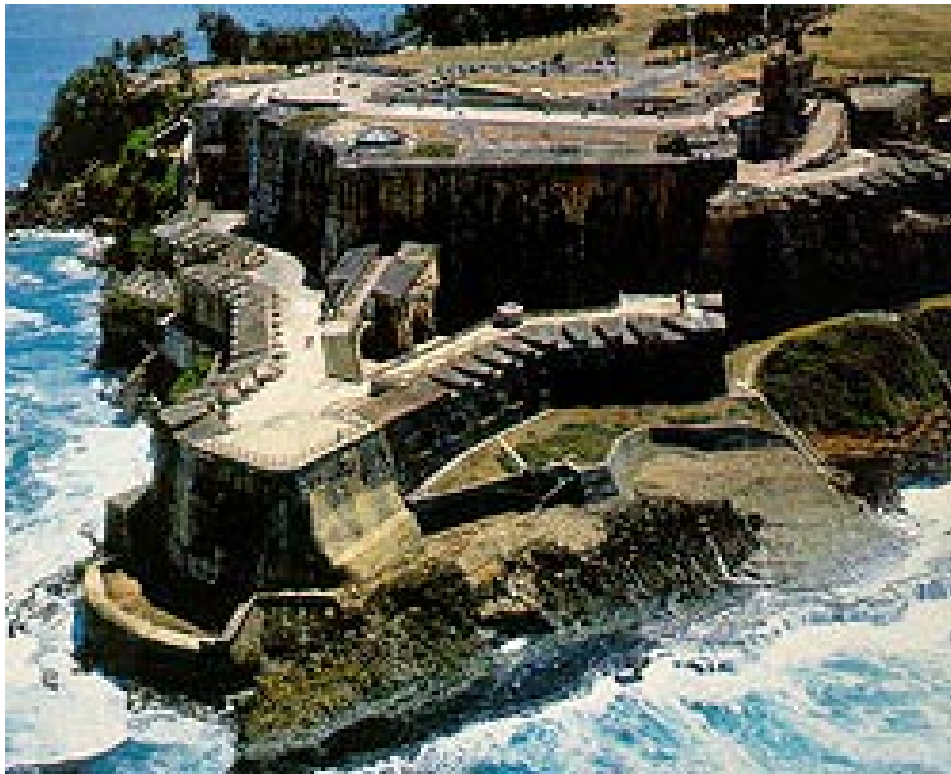
**Figure 1. Location of San Juan National Historic Site**



**El Morro** – El Morro is one of the main attractions of the park (see Figure 2). A visitor center that consists of exhibits, interpretive programs, and a gift shop is located inside the

fort. The El Morro fort entrance gate is located 600 feet from the city street intersection. It is connected by a long gravel-paved, pedestrian-only walkway that crosses the El Morro Esplanade. The pathway was once a paved access road until the NPS closed off all vehicular access and removed the pavement in 1989. A 1994 Traffic Access, Parking and Safety Study found that the access changes had reduced visitation to El Morro by approximately one-third and made elderly and handicap access difficult. In hot weather months, the walk from the curb to the fort entrance gate can be quite oppressive. Currently, there is no parking available at El Morro. The nearest parking is approximately one-quarter mile from the street entrance to the walkway in a parking garage beneath the Quin-Centennial Plaza. Currently, that parking facility is underutilized. Part of the reason is the relatively long walk from the parking garage to the entrance of the fort.

**Figure 2. El Morro**



**San Cristóbal** – The San Cristóbal fort and outworks are located along the northern coast of Old San Juan and approximately one mile east of El Morro. Public access is provided on the west side of the fort via a visitor parking area on Norzagaray Boulevard. Visitors typically arrive in private vehicles or minibuses. There are approximately 15 parking spaces and limited drop-off for minibuses. Figure 3 shows the layout of the parking facility at San Cristobal. During peak periods, there can be 20 or more minibuses competing for a limited amount of parking spaces. To remedy this problem, the adjacent grass area of the Bastion is being used temporarily as a minibus parking area. There are no parking spaces for full-size buses. Parking is very limited and the parking lot often operates at capacity.

**Figure 3. Parking Lots at San Cristobal**



**The City Walls and San Juan Gate** (see Figure 4) – The old city walls surround the northern, western and part of the southwestern sections of Old San Juan. They were part of the old coastal defense that protected the city. The San Juan Gate is located in the southwestern part of the wall and is one of the major tourist attractions.

**Figure 4. San Juan Gate**



Park visitation has been fairly level throughout the past several years. In 1998, approximately 2.3 million visitors visited the Park. Of these visitors, approximately one million came from cruise ships that dock on the south side of Old San Juan. Peak visitation occurs in the summer months, between June and August, with many visitors arriving from the New York area. Weekends are typically more crowded than weekdays. However, peak visitation from visitors on cruise ships occur in the winter months between November and

May. Many of the cruise ship passengers also visit other parts of Old San Juan as part of a day-tour. The average time a visitor spends in the Park is approximately one to two hours. However, for cruise ship visitors, the average time spent in each location is approximately 20 minutes. This is mainly as a result of minibuses that limit the time visitors can spend at each location.

A visitor study conducted in February, 1999 revealed that 12 percent were local visitors, while 10 percent were from New York. The rest were scattered throughout 42 other states. International visitors accounted for approximately 11 percent of all visitors to the Park, with the majority from Canada and England. Half of visitor groups were family groups, and over three-fourths of visitors were making their first trip to the Park. The most popular destinations were El Morro (78 percent), San Cristóbal (60 percent), the San Juan Gate and city walls (59 percent), and the Esplanade (52 percent). Some visitors who parked at the San Cristóbal area also expressed in the survey that the parking lot was full and crowded.

Since the Park is located in the historic part of Old San Juan, the streets and buildings pre-date the automobile and are very narrow and winding. Many streets are less than 20 feet wide and make automobile traffic and parking a constant problem for the municipality of San Juan. To further exacerbate the problem, local residents of the Island cruise through Old San Juan as a recreational pastime. This popular local activity occurs on weekends and evenings throughout the year. One of the popular driving routes includes Norzagaray Street past San Cristóbal and towards El Morro. As a result, the municipality regularly closes access roads to El Morro and San Cristóbal to all but residential traffic. This causes a major access problem for Park visitors.

Moreover, parking is a major concern in Old San Juan. The shortage of spaces and a high demand for parking, compounded by ineffective enforcement and the general lack of compliance to parking restrictions, have made the parking situation in Old San Juan a constant nightmare. People tend to illegally park their vehicles where it is most convenient. This often includes on sidewalks, on the lawn, or double-parking in the street. The lack of towing enforcement and a parking citation of a mere \$5.00 have encouraged people to ignore parking restrictions and “take the chance.” To remedy the problem, the NPS has found that replacing standard curb sections with 15-inch-high curbs and the installation of concrete “ballards” have been effective in reducing the level of illegal parking.

## ■ 2.0 Existing ATS

Old San Juan is served by various forms of public transportation. The Metropolitan Bus Authority (MBA) provides scheduled bus service from different locations in San Juan. Service, however, is sporadic and unreliable. As a result of congestion and inadequate route supervision, the MBA buses often do not adhere to published schedules. Públicos (privately owned and operated vans, cars) also provide demand response service from different points in the San Juan Metropolitan Area. It is the dominant form of public transportation in Puerto Rico. Públicos do not operate on any fixed schedule, and there is no public information available on routes and fares.

A “trolley” system also provides free transit service in Old San Juan. It uses open-air tram-type buses with rubber tires. The trolley route includes major public parking facilities, the commercial district, El Morro and San Cristóbal, as well as other major attractions within Old San Juan. The San Juan municipality is responsible for its operation. The trolley departs the Covadonga Terminal every five minutes but does not follow a fixed schedule. Service may vary throughout the day, depending on demand and traffic conditions on the street. As a result, service is not very reliable.

The AcuaExpreso is a ferry system operated by the Puerto Rico Ports Authority. This system provides direct waterborne transportation from Hato Rey and Cataño to Old San Juan. Service leaves every one-half hour and operates from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. daily.

Although not considered as a form of public transportation, almost one million visitors per year from cruise ships are shuttled to the Park sites in 22-passenger chartered minibuses. The minibuses stop off at various locations in Old San Juan and allow passengers to spend 20 to 30 minutes at each location. They are mainly organized into owner-operator companies. Each company organizes and promotes their own tours and works with the cruise ship operators to provide ground transportation services for cruise visitors while they are on the island.

### ■ 3.0 ATS Needs

A 1994 Traffic Access, Parking and Safety Study has recommended implementing two types of Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS). The first is an electric tram type vehicle to transport visitors to and from the curb loading and unloading area to the entrance of El Morro. This would reduce the total visit time at El Morro and reduce the space needed to accommodate tour buses and private vehicles. Furthermore, tram vehicles would allow greater handicap and elderly access. The service can also extend to the parking garage at the Quin-Centennial Plaza. This would reduce the need for visitors to walk a long distance to the El Morro fort entrance. The second ATS system would connect El Morro with San Cristóbal. A shuttle system can provide direct access between the two sites. The study recommended the NPS or a concessioner to operate the service. However, the Park should also explore the potential (with the municipality) to improve the existing trolley system. Since the trolley already provides service to El Morro and San Cristóbal, the Park can work cooperatively with the municipality to arrange for a dedicated or modified trolley service that would reduce headway and improve service reliability to the NPS-associated sites.

### ■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

There is a need to connect different sites within the Park system with some form of ATS. Currently, El Morro and San Cristóbal are approximately one mile from each other. The San Juan Gate is another one-half mile away from El Morro. There is no reliable public

transportation that connects these major attraction sites. There is also a need for a convenient and reliable ATS in Old San Juan. The current forms of ATS, the trolley and público, do not operate on a fixed schedule, therefore making it difficult for Park visitors and local residents to rely on them for reliable service. Furthermore, the lack of reliable ATS forces local residents and employees to resort to driving their private vehicles. This further exacerbates traffic congestion in a city that was not designed to accommodate automobiles.

## ■ 5.0 Bibliography

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## ■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Mark Hardgrove, deputy superintendent, San Juan National Historic Site